

## May 2015 extended essay reports

### HISTORY

#### Overall grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	E	D	C	B	A
<b>Mark range:</b>	0-7	8-15	16-22	23-28	29-36

#### The range and suitability of the work submitted

It is very encouraging to witness the production of successful essays which are the result of student engagement and effective supervisor support. Such essays reveal insight into the selected topic and the skills necessary to produce a well-structured, focused and relevant investigation of a clearly stated research question. Initiative in the choice of sources- both primary and secondary- is impressive. With such a large candidature however, it is also the case that a significant number of essays are done in a perfunctory manner, showing scant evidence of care in the selection of a suitable historical topic or awareness of what constitutes acceptable formal presentation. A number of candidates do not appear to understand what is required of in this component: they fail to select an appropriate topic/area of study in History, plan and write a structured, well supported and adequately referenced extended piece of work which conforms to most of the criteria. These problems can be laid at the door of the candidate in some cases – but of considerable concern is the fact that supervisors themselves appear unaware (or unclear in their own minds) of the expectations of the exercise and the regulations contained in the Extended Essay Guide.

Senior examiners involved in EE assessment in History continue to stress the importance of the role of the supervisor in the Extended Essay process- from the selection of a suitable topic through to the final stages of the essay prior to submission. While the Extended Essay is, of course, the work of the individual student, the guidance of the supervisor plays a crucial role in aiding candidates to understand and effectively address the demands of the EE. The supervisor is charged with providing the candidate with accurate advice on how to meet the requirements of the various criteria which are assessed in the EE. It is clear that in a minority of cases candidates have not been well advised as to the suitability of the task being undertaken. Some candidates appear to enter the Extended Essay under 'History' even though the relevance to the discipline is minimal. For some candidates and Centres it should be made clear that the EE is not an invitation to present a descriptive/narrative report on a topic but an opportunity to undertake a focused investigation of a legitimate historical question which lends itself to the development of a clear, logical and coherent reasoned argument.

Some candidates, despite advice, will no doubt choose to go their own way and ignore the advice of the supervisor but others appear to be victims of weak supervision resulting in a lack of comprehension of the individual criteria. In these cases candidates lose marks unnecessarily.

It is imperative that supervisors be offered the opportunity by their centres to participate in Professional Development- either through attendance at IB conferences or through on-line opportunities provided by IB. Such professional development can only help supervisors realise the importance of their task and aid candidates in undertaking this valuable academic exercise. Candidates require advice from the outset on what constitutes a valid question for investigation in an EE in History. The choice by some candidates to focus on topics or events within the last ten years is inadmissible and such efforts should have been picked up by supervisors and disallowed for submission as History EEs.

## Candidate performance against each criterion

### Criterion A: research question

The great majority of essays submitted continue to be appropriate to the study of History in terms of chronology (i.e. should not focus on events in the last 10 years) and suitability (i.e. dealt with issues which focused on the human past and avoided triviality).

Candidates are enjoined to place a 'clearly stated' and 'sharply focused' research question in the introduction to the essay in order to meet the requirements for the 2 marks. Examiners do however accept the provision of a clearly articulated research question either on a title page (not the cover sheet) or as a 'standalone' question placed at the top of the first (introductory section) page.

It does however make sense for the research question to be placed in the introduction since it allows a natural (and hopefully smooth) transition to meeting the requirements of Criterion B where the chosen task can be commented upon in terms of context and worthiness of the research question.

The choice of command term in the phrasing of the research question is important. Essays which use 'What?' or 'How?' (With no further qualification) as command terms are invariably narrative or descriptive in their approach and analysis and reasoned judgement are inadequately dealt with accordingly. 'To what extent...?' is an acceptable and commonly used command term but candidates need to ensure that there is identification and consideration of 'other factors' to enable the 'extent' element to be effectively addressed.

### Criterion B: introduction

Candidates need to deal with both the issues of context and worthiness of the investigation. The former requirement does not necessitate 'lengthy, irrelevant background material' but the provision of information that sets the research question concisely and precisely into its historical and/or academic context. The introduction should be clearly labelled. The latter requirement ('significance' and why the topic is 'worthy of investigation' is often ignored or

dealt with by candidates in a very generalised manner in which they explain why the topic was of interest to them personally rather than why the topic merits an historical investigation. For full marks both areas have to be effectively and relevantly addressed. Candidates should also clearly indicate where the introduction ends.

### Criterion C: investigation

The most successful essays revealed evidence of an appropriate number and range of sources and were well planned. Increasingly, internet sites have formed the bulk of the resource base used by some candidates and in some cases this is both legitimate and understandable –for example if essays are based on primary materials which are available on dedicated and academically creditable sites. A continuing concern is the use of sites of little real academic value by weaker candidates who fail to realise that the sites and the material contained within them may be subjective and/or inaccurate. History revision sites designed for grades 8-10, Wikipedia, Shmoop and Brainy Quote rarely provide sufficient academic detail to support any argument of academic merit or historical depth of detail to substantiate claims being made.

One growing trend in essays has been the tendency of candidates to narrate or describe what various historians say about events, rather than selecting and deploying historical knowledge as the basis for the candidate's own interpretation. There is often no attempt made to investigate how and/or why historians or contemporary commentators arrived at these interpretations and whether these are valid. Some candidates continue to labour under the impression that this constitutes 'historiography' and that this will impress the examiner. As pointed out in the last report for History EE, in neither case is this so.

It remains the case that candidates who successfully identify relevant areas of investigation or themes at the outset (this is obvious from the table of contents which indicates how a candidate has planned and structured the essay) are more likely to produce essays that are both focused and fluent in the presentation of their argument.

### Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied

Performance here varies widely. The best essays moved beyond the general and showed evidence of research which resulted in the selection and deployment of relevant historical knowledge. This enabled the candidate to construct a convincing level of argumentation revealing a sound grasp of the topic area and at the highest levels an awareness of the 'academic context for the investigation'.

Where the evidence base was weak, or sources inadequate in terms of number or quality, candidates encountered difficulty in reaching the upper levels of the marks available for Criterion D. The belief that 'academic context' can be dealt with by referring in the most general manner to the existence of 'revisionist historians' and 'orthodox interpretations' is illusory in some cases when it becomes clear that such terms are not really understood by weaker candidates who simply include such terms in the mistaken belief that this somehow will gain credit for 'locating the investigation in an academic context'.

### Criterion E: reasoned argument

Most candidates were able to construct a reasoned argument in terms of 'a logical and coherent structure.' As mentioned above in relation to Criterion A, for the argument to be convincing- especially in essays which used a 'To what extent...?' command term 'other factors' and contrasting opinions need to be identified and dealt with. Descriptive/narrative treatment of topics fared poorly in terms of this particular criterion. Similarly, weaker candidates who stated 'personal views' were unable to access the higher awards for this criterion.

### Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills

Application of analytical and evaluative skills are amongst the most problematic areas for many candidates partly because a significant number of students have not been sufficiently well advised as to what constitutes analysis and what evaluation of the sources entails. Better essays revealed a high level of attainment in these areas as candidates were able to critically comment on the factual evidence being used in the construction of the argument and were able to evaluate evidence/sources being used in an integrated manner within the essay.

Harking back to the 2010 report, the following was stated in relation to evaluation:

'A worrying development in terms of evaluation is the fact that individual supervisors and entire centres have instructed candidates that it is appropriate to adopt an Internal Assessment approach here to evaluation. This led to candidates writing discrete sections, labelled 'Evaluation' and then proceeding to evaluate (usually) two sources for O, P, V, and L. This is not an Internal Assessment investigation and evaluative skills should be integrated within the main body and not dealt with in this way-or in the form of an annotated bibliography.'

The 'IA approach' and 'standalone' treatment by centres still occurs as does the annotated bibliography- but less so than in the past. Evaluation of sources which are relegated to the bibliography, or sometimes to footnotes, cannot be credited for the purpose of an award for this criterion.

### Criterion G: use of language appropriate to the subject:

Clear communication of the information continues to be the norm rather than the exception. Sweeping assertions still abound in weaker investigations. Most candidates though seemed to realise the need to support claims being made and to use vocabulary and subject specific terminology in keeping with the nature of a History Extended Essay.

### Criterion H: conclusion

Virtually all essays were provided with a conclusion but candidates need to be reminded that the judgements reached and pronounced upon here must be consistent with what has gone before. The introduction of new material is not only inappropriate but can lead to marks being lost.

### Criterion I: formal presentation

In relation to 'formal presentation' it remains the case that marks are lost needlessly by candidates who are not well versed and practised in the use of an appropriate bibliographical and referencing system. There are 4 marks available for this section: it is rare to see the full award being given. This should be an area in which all candidates should be able to pick up a decent award –if they are sufficiently prepared and then conscientious in applying what they have been taught in relation to the presentation of references, bibliographies etc.

Candidates should be reminded that the bibliography should contain only sources which have been cited in the essay. If a candidate wishes to provide information about works which have been read but not cited in the essay they can do so by producing a Works Cited and a Works Consulted division in the bibliography which then makes clear what has been referenced and what has been consulted.

### Criterion J: abstract

The Abstract, is done last by candidates and perhaps candidate fatigue may explain the failure of so many to achieve the full marks here. Three areas need to be present and clearly stated (within a 300 word limit). The scope is usually the element which is most poorly done. Candidates are not required to give a précis of the essay but should explain what themes or areas of investigation are to be undertaken in order to allow them to reach a balanced judgement on the question they have chosen and hopefully identified at the beginning of the Abstract.

Dealing with the three requirements of the Abstract in the specific order of RQ, Scope, and Conclusion is recommended. Sometimes candidates produce Abstracts in which the actual research question is not obvious until the end- or the areas of investigation (scope) are only referred to in passing in the conclusion. This can lead to a lack of clarity and the inability therefore to gain full marks.

### Criterion K: holistic judgement

Supervisor comments are welcomed by examiners and can aid in deciding the award for the holistic judgement criterion. It is not necessary for the teacher/supervisor to provide marks for the criteria nor make comments on the 'excellence' or otherwise of the EE.

## Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

Supervisors are crucial to the success of the great majority of students undertaking an Extended Essay and need to be clear as to their responsibilities- through reading of the Guide but also through exposure to Professional Development opportunities - either those organised by IB or possibly through cooperation within the school and/or the district/region with experienced Extended Essay supervisors. Future changes to the Extended Essay will necessitate supervisor /student meetings which will not only provide the basis for an award of a proposed 18% under the criterion 'Engagement' but also an opportunity for closer communication between supervisor and candidate in the process of the production of the essay. This new criterion will assess 'the extent to which the student has engaged with their

supervisor in the planning and progress of their research' and the extent to which 'the student has reflected on and considered the decision making progress in relation to their planning'

Ensure that students have access to the Guide for Extended Essays and to reports such as this.

Candidates should be instructed in basic skills of presentation and need to be conversant with the use of an accepted bibliographical and referencing convention.

These skills are skills that should form part of the general educational programme of students long before undertaking and EE and arguably could be introduced at a pre- IB level so that students are familiar with requirements.

The Extended Essay in History is not the internal assessment component and the treatment of evaluation as recommended in the IA (in a discrete section) is not what is expected in the Extended Essay where comments should be integrated into the essay.

A reminder: some centres encourage candidates to provide an annotated bibliography. Please be aware that since the bibliography does not form part of the word count, any evaluation of sources by candidates in this section is irrelevant and cannot be considered for purposes of awards in relation to 'evaluation'.

In the Abstract avoid a précis and provide the themes/areas for investigation for 'scope'.

The research question really belongs in the introduction- as indicated in the EE Guide and this should be encouraged. Even if it has been written on a title page, it should be integrated into the introduction where it allows for a smooth transition to identification of 'context' and 'worthiness' (as required by Criterion B).

It stands to reason that essays which are 3,000 words or less are unlikely to achieve satisfactory levels of attainment in many of the criteria.